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SUBJECT: EGYPT'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEVELOPMENT IN
AFGHANISTAN, PAST AND FUTURE

Classified By: Assistant Ambassador Joseph Mussomeli for reasons 1.4(b)
and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Egyptian Charge d'Affaires (CDA) Karim Sharaf told PolCouns on 6/16 that Egypt was actively contributing to development in Afghanistan, but could do more with funding from international partners. With assistance from the International Community (IC), Egypt could: 1) establish an Arabic and Pashto religious radio station that promoted moderate Islam; 2) provide Afghans with popular moderate Islamic Egyptian religious television programming; 3) refurbish the Abu Hanifa madrassah in Kabul; 4) expand the training it provides Afghans in Water Resource Management and Agriculture; 5) continue to support the polio-eradication effort in Afghanistan. We see some promising initiatives which could be a subject of discussion during AMB Holbrooke's upcoming visit to Cairo.

Egyptian Development Efforts

¶2. (SBU) Sharaf explained the key initiatives Egypt has been conducting here:

¶3. (C) Al Azhar Institute: The al Azhar University, Egypt and the Muslim world's premiere university, has a satellite institute in Kabul from which visiting al Azhar sheikhs offer religious advice and instruction to interested Afghans in a more moderate form of Islam. The sheikhs also offer interpretations of Islamic teachings that challenge certain Afghan interpretations of Islamic tradition (such as the burkha, which predates Islam).

¶4. (C) Another program focuses on capacity building in the rule of law area. Egyptian judges, in conjunction with the IC, train Afghan judges, prosecutors, Ministry of Justice employees, and others on good legal practice and procedures. The Afghan judicial system is based on the Egyptian one. The last visiting judges left two years ago; the Egyptian embassy is trying to arrange for them (or alternates) to return.

¶5. (C) Egypt has also sponsored a successful Egyptian Army Field Hospital operating at Bagram Air Base. The hospital, with its mixed-gender staff, treats both men and women from the general public, and has been very well-received. Sharaf reported that people come from all over the country, even Kabul, to receive treatment from the Egyptians.

Potential Areas for Cooperation

¶6. (SBU) Polio Eradication: Egypt has also been very active in efforts to eradicate polio in Afghanistan, in cooperation with the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the World Health Organization (WHO). Sharaf believed the GOE would consider a request by the USG to provide additional Egyptian personnel to the WHO. If the effort were to be a bilateral one between Egypt and Afghanistan, then Egypt has a number of NGOs that could help. If the effort were to be a

multinational one, then GOE would need funding support to provide personnel.

¶17. (C) Water Resource Management and Agricultural training: Egypt is already running such programs now, through cooperation with the Food and Agriculture Organization. It could increase activities with greater funding. Egypt has trained 15 water resource engineers, 8 meteorologists, and 4 alternative livelihood specialists, in Cairo-based training programs. Sharaf cautioned that Egypt's ability to provide capacity building was limited, as Egypt itself is a developing country.

¶18. (C) Arabic and Pashto-language radio station: it could focus on Islamic law topics, and feature speeches and lessons from famous, widely-respected Egyptian clerics. Programming is ready to transmit, has been used widely in Egypt, and been well-received.

¶19. (C) Egyptian religious television programs: Again, pre-existing resources that teach a moderate form of Sunni Islam. Programs have been very well-received by the Ummah.

¶10. (C) Refurbishing of the Abu Hanifa school in Kabul: Abu Hanifa has a long and sometimes checkered legacy in Afghanistan, as a number of mujahideen and Taliban leaders graduated from there. The school is now in disrepair, which, Sharaf argues, offers an opportunity. A program to rehabilitate and expand facilities, while bringing in qualified and moderate educators, could help reclaim a generation of Abu Hanifa students. This, in turn, could swing the views of conservative Afghans to favor peace and

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reconciliation. The school could be refurbished for \$60K - bringing in running water and electricity, providing new learning materials (texts, computers, etc.), and expanding facilities to teach up to 1,200 students (including girls), up from its current enrollment of 800. Egypt might consider sending sheikhs from al Azhar to take over the curriculum at this school, and introduce their teachings of a more moderate Islam.

Approaches to GOE

¶11. (C) Sharaf suggested that Embassy Cairo first approach the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (EMFA) to exchange ideas on greater Egyptian involvement in Afghanistan, and ways for the IC to help fund Egypt's efforts in a low-profile manner.

¶12. (C) Sharaf suggested that if the United States wished to raise these issues at the time of AMB Holbrooke's visit, we should bring specific proposals to raise, rather than seeking Egyptian ideas. He feared if we simply asked for ideas, our Egyptian counterparts would have no substantive responses.

¶13. (C) Sharaf also suggested the United States should encourage Kuwait and other Gulf nations to do more in Afghanistan.

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